SLOAN

Jay Ferguson: GUITARS/VOCALS
Chris Murphy: BASS/VOCALS
Patrick Pentland: GUITARS/VOCALS
Andrew Scott: DRUMS/VOCALS

When Sloan recorded their first album, they were a band in their early 20's who were virtually unknown outside of their home of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Within the course of six months, Halifax was deemed a hotbed of burgeoning talent. Sloan signed a deal with DGC. The album that they had bashed out in a local studio became their major label debut.

The trouble with Cinderella stories is, midnight has to strike sooner or later. "We did our [second] album with a real producer," says guitarist/vocalist Patrick Pentland, "and we spent a lot of time working on getting the right sounds. That record sounds great, but it drained some of the fun out of playing together, and that was the beginning of a lot of things that year that weren't much fun. So with *One Chord to Another*, (the band's first release on THE ENCLAVE) we decided to take things into our own hands and do it for ourselves, and not worry about what people would think, because we weren't sure when, where, or even if we would put it out."

Like the band's other two albums, *One Chord* is different in both style and approach from what they've done before—not a "departure" or an "experiment" or a "sidetrack," just different. As indicated by the album's opening shrieks (lifted from a summerfest show that the band headlined), melody, energy and brevity are the main priorities, with most of the songs cramming a memorable hookline, a scintillating harmony-driven chorus, and a deft middle-eight into just about two-and-a-half minutes.

The regal hand of Sergeant Pepper or pawprints of "Pet Sounds"—as well as the Hollies, the Zombies, T. Rex and even Chicago—may be noted by People Who Notice Those Things, yet the influences are always used as a means rather than an end. The band's songwriting is smart, succinct, and extremely varied, veering from the power-pop rush of the opening "Good In Everyone" to the brass-speckled "Everything You've Done Wrong" to the psychedelicized "Anyone Who's Anyone." There's even a song driven by a horrendously out-of-tune piano.

"We don't have any rules about what the band's supposed to sound like," says bassist/vocalist Chris Murphy. "We don't have to go off and do little side projects—although we have done that—to satisfy our 'artistic needs' or whatever. We can do what we want, and the albums are all pretty varied. This time, we were really trying to discipline ourselves to make the songs shorter and more succinct, and we just went in and did it fast and cheap. It ended up being my favorite Sloan record."

More than most groupings of humans, Sloan is a democracy, switching off instruments as well as lead vocals and songwriting and just about everything else. "It's a four-way tie," Chris says. "Different people have different strengths and weaknesses, but we try to take every situation and make it work. It caused some problems earlier, because it can be hard to market a band that basically has four heads. I can understand that, but there's just no 'main guy' in this band—although Patrick's had the last two singles, that prick!"

The seeds of Sloan were sown in late-'80s Halifax, where teenaged Jay worked in the local cool record store and formed a band with Chris called Kearney Lake Road. "We were into the Minutemen and No Means No and supercomplicated punk-type stuff," says Chris. Sloan officially formed in '91, Chris having met Andrew in typical rock fashion while both were attending art school.

The February '92 East Coast Music Conference became the debutante ball for Halifax bands as major label A&R reps descended in droves, to the considerable bewilder- and bemusement of the objects of their expense accounts. For better or worse, Sloan won top "buzz" billing, signing with DGC that summer and releasing their debut full-length album, *Smeared* toward the end of the year.

"That was something we never, ever dreamed would happen," Chris says. "We didn't even know anyone who had spoken to anybody on a major label." The album garnered a garland of press plaudits from the likes of Rolling Stone, NME, and CMJ, eventually going gold in Canada.

"I like that record," Chris says, "I can hear how enthusiastic we were, and how much we felt we were a part of 'the new music.' But on our second album, we turned our backs on that whole sound—we wanted to outrun it before it caught up with us."

The more stripped-down and melancholy *Twice Removed* did great at home but not quite as well Stateside, winning the dubious honor of being one of Spin's "Top Ten Albums You Didn't Hear" for '94. On the other hand, it was somewhat hyperbolically named "The Best Canadian Album Of All Time" by The Chart. "That was incredibly nice," Andrew allows, "but it's also ridiculous, and we know that."

The band took a break during the first half of '95, with Chris touring as drummer with the Super Friendz, Andrew playing with Toronto's Sadies and his own band, The Maker's Mark (he continues to work with both bands), while Jay worked at Murder and assisted with the management of The Inbreds, as well as co-producing the debut album from Montreal's Local Rabbits. Sloan reunited to tour in the summer, and also released the "Same Old Flame"/"Stood Up" 7" (recorded on four-track) on Murder. *One Chord* was finished by the summer of '96, and the band hit the road again.

Meanwhile, Murderecords has become one of Canada's biggest and most vital indie labels. "We formed Murder out of necessity, because there was no other way for us to put out a record," Chris says. "But we actually made money on the *Peppermint* EP, and we decided to put out an Eric's *Trip* EP, and then Hardship Post, and all of the sudden we had a record label, as opposed to just helping out ourselves and some friends." The band's burgeoning schedule led them to hire a staff, which handles the label's day-to-day. "We pretty much decide which records we're going to put out," Jay says. "Not that we're these high-and-mighty tastemakers with a bunch of peons working for us (laughs), although we did just move up to the 17th floor of this bank building. It's really funny—it's all law offices except for this little area in the corner with Beatles and Iggy Pop posters." Over its five year/25-release existence, the label has released singles, albums and EPs by the aforementioned acts and other home-grown talent like Jale, The Super Friendz, Zumpano, Thrush Hermit, and Local Rabbits; they've also licensed virtually all of Cardinal/Moles kingpin Richard Davies' recorded output for Canadian release.

Despite the success of their label and their extracurricular activities, Sloan remains the main priority for its members. "Before we made *One Chord To Another*, we'd been going for four years and we were all pretty tired," Jay says. "But we had such a blast making this album that I can't wait to do the next one. It's the four of us playing together that makes it Sloan."

DISCOGRAPHY

"Underwhelmed" on Hear And Now compilation (DTK) 1991
Peppermint EP (Murder) 1991
Smeared (DGC) 1992
Underwhelmed 12" / CD single (w/ "Amped" & "Sleepover") (Geffen UK) 1993
I Am The Cancer 12"/CD single (w/ "Laying Blame" & "Rag Doll") (Geffen UK) 1993
Pillowfight on NeverMind The Molluscs 7" (SubPop) 1994
Twice Removed (DGC) 1994
Stove/Smother (split 7" w/Eric's Trip) (Murder) 1994
Same Old Flame/Stood Up 7" (Murder) 1995
One Chord To Another (The Enclave) 1997

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